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## Edith Stein on the Highest Expression of the *Feminine Genius*

The *feminine genius* is the ability of women to make a sincere gift of themselves to others.<sup>1</sup> Keeping in mind the spiritual nature of woman’s vocation, that is, to be spiritual wife and spiritual mother, Edith Stein unpacks what it means for women to make a sincere gift of themselves to others in family, professional, and religious life through their personal outlook, active sympathy, intuitive grasp, and emotional perception.<sup>2</sup> She also shows how the *feminine genius*, rooted in woman’s spousal and maternal nature and vocation, can become perverted when the flesh practices an unrestrained rule over the soul. This unrestrained rule of the flesh over the soul is expressed in the heart’s hatred, anger, envy, etc. To root out these obstacles, obstacles which prevent her from building loving relationships, women need to spiritualize their bodies by cultivating love, peace, gentleness, etc., in their hearts<sup>3</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> See Alexandra Cathey, “The Gospel’s Vision for Women and the *Feminine Genius*,” *Studia Gilsoniana* 6, no. 4 (October–December 2017): 511–526.

<sup>2</sup> See Alexandra Cathey, “The Feminine Genius According to Edith Stein,” *Studia Gilsoniana* 7, no. 2 (April–June 2018): 296–320.

<sup>3</sup> See *ibid.*, 320–327.

undertaking emotional formation. Through emotional formation, which teaches them to make correct value judgement, women can safeguard the correct hierarchy of values by first and foremost upholding the dignity of life.<sup>4</sup>

Now, if Edith Stein is right that the world needs “maternal arms and maternal hearts” ready to embrace the wounded and comfort the sorrowful,<sup>5</sup> the world needs women who selflessly come to the aid of those in need and, without hesitation, wisely know precisely how to meet their specific needs. In other words, the world needs women who see in the Blessed Virgin Mary the highest expression of the *feminine genius*.

In this article, I will present (1) Edith Stein’s insights into what it means to walk with Mary and how her imitation provides women a secure path to nurturing a healthy emotional life necessary for fruitful spiritual motherhood and spiritual companionship, and (2) Edith Stein’s life which offers a concrete and relatively recent example of how the imitation of Mary helps women unlock their *feminine genius*.

### **Women’s Walk with Mary**

In the Blessed Virgin Mary, women find the exemplar of the wife and the mother and the highest expression of the *feminine genius*. Mary selflessly interested herself, and continues to do so, in the concerns of

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<sup>4</sup> See *ibid.*, 328–334.

<sup>5</sup> In the words of Stein, “Millions of children today are homeless and orphaned, even though they do have a home and a mother. They hunger for love and eagerly await a guiding hand to draw them out of dirt and misery into purity and light. How could it be otherwise than that our great holy mother the Church should open her arms wide to take these beloved of the Lord to her heart? But for this she needs human arms and human hearts, maternal arms and maternal hearts.” Freda Mary Oben, *Edith Stein: Scholar, Feminist, Saint* (New York: Alba House, 1988), 73.

others; it is her gift and happiness.<sup>6</sup> In this section, I will draw from Scripture to show how Mary expressed her *feminine genius* in her interactions with others, especially as portrayed in the Mysteries of the Rosary. For, in contemplating the Mysteries of the Rosary, Mary demonstrates the fullness of the maternal and spousal calling through the sharing of her feminine emotional life.

Mary is the highest expression of the *feminine genius*, because she gives the entirety of her being as a gift to God and to humanity. She accompanies all people on their journey to Christ as they unite their lives to the Joyful, Glorious, Sorrowful, and Luminous Mysteries, and knows precisely when it is time to weep or laugh, to mourn or to dance. Life is a Rosary. Women, by attuning their hearts to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, can learn how to accompany others with the wisdom and sensitivity of Mary as a guide.

Meditating on the Mysteries of the Rosary gives women a secure path toward fruitful spiritual motherhood and spiritual companionship. The Immaculate Heart of Mary rejoiced when it was time to rejoice and wept when it was time to weep. She rejoiced at the Annunciation of the Incarnation by the Archangel Gabriel and responded with the most wonderful *fiat*, her total surrender to God.<sup>7</sup> The joy of her heart was rooted in giving herself freely, totally, faithfully, and fruitfully to our Lord as His handmaid. We experience the richness of her emotional life and of her incredibly humble and grateful attitude in her Magnificat

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<sup>6</sup> Edith Stein, *Essays on Woman*, ed. Lucy Gelber and Romaeus Leuven, O.C.D., trans. Freda Mary Oben (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1996), 46. Hereafter Stein's book will be cited: Stein, *Woman*.

<sup>7</sup> Stein says, "The deepest feminine yearning is to achieve a loving union which, in its development, validates [her] maturation and simultaneously stimulates and furthers the desire for perfection in others; this yearning can express itself in the most diverse forms, and some of these forms may appear distorted, even degenerate. . . . Such yearning is an essential aspect of the eternal destiny of woman. It is not simply a human longing but is specifically feminine and opposed to the specifically masculine nature." Stein, *Woman*, 94.

during the Visitation: Μεγαλύνει ἡ ψυχὴ μου τὸν Κύριον.<sup>8</sup> Women can attune their hearts to Mary's as she expressed the intensity of her joy; her soul magnified, extolled, lauded, and celebrated the Lord.

Women can also enter into the scene of the Nativity of Our Lord and experience the “at last” moment as Mary beholds the face of Jesus for the first time; this image of our Lady can give women great comfort and strength as they endured the pangs of labor.

Mary, who had the privilege of comforting her son Jesus, reflects the various maternal images of God seen throughout Sacred Scripture.<sup>9</sup> Women can also learn from Mary how to grapple with mixed emotions. The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, an occasion for celebration for Jewish families, was the day her son's death was prophesied: “[A] sword will pierce even your own soul.”<sup>10</sup> Then again, she experienced complex emotions when her son was lost, and, then, when he was found. The response Jesus gave her mother must have underwhelmed her heart: “‘Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You.’ And He said to them, ‘Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s house?’”<sup>11</sup> How many times do mothers suffer for their children without their children's knowledge or understanding? She experienced the most profound sorrow, but not one devoid of hope and trust in God, while her Son agonized in the garden of Gethsemane, while He was scourged at the pillar by Roman soldiers, when He was crowned with a wreath of thorns, when He carried the Cross, and, most especially, when He was crucified.

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<sup>8</sup> “My soul magnifies the Lord.” See Luke 1:46–55 for the Magnificat.

<sup>9</sup> See Hosea 11:3–4, Hosea 13:8, Deuteronomy 32:11–12, Deuteronomy 32:18, Isaiah 66:13, Isaiah 49:15, Isaiah 42:14, Psalm 131:2, Psalm 121:2–3, Matthew 23:27 and Luke 13:34, and Luke 15:8–10.

<sup>10</sup> *NASB* Luke 2:35.

<sup>11</sup> Luke 2:48–49.

At the Crucifixion Mary's maternal heart and rich emotional life shines through. The sword that Simeon<sup>12</sup> predicted would pierce her heart became the very channel through which she embraced all of humanity as mother and companion.<sup>13</sup> John Paul II unites Mary's suffering with the suffering of all women and highlights the role that woman's sensitivity plays in suffering:

As we contemplate this Mother, whose heart "a sword has pierced" (cf. Lk 2:35), our thoughts go to all the suffering women in the world, suffering either physically or morally. In this suffering a woman's sensitivity plays a role, even though she often succeeds in resisting suffering better than a man. It is difficult to enumerate these sufferings; it is difficult to call them all by name. We may recall her maternal care for her children, especially when they fall sick or fall into bad ways; the death of those most dear to her; the loneliness of mothers forgotten by their grown-up children; the loneliness of widows; the sufferings of women who struggle alone to make a living; and women who have been wronged or exploited. Then there are the sufferings of consciences as a result of sin, which has wounded the woman's human or maternal dignity: the wounds of consciences which do not heal easily. With these sufferings too we must place ourselves at the foot of the Cross.<sup>14</sup>

Women can unite their maternal hearts with Mary's and, in this way, be a source of healing for humanity's woundedness by never losing trust and hope in the Lord.

As women walk with Mary through the Mysteries of the Rosary, she leads them ever closer to Christ. In fact, for Stein, imitation of

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<sup>12</sup> See Luke 2:35.

<sup>13</sup> See John 19:26.

<sup>14</sup> John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Apostolic Letter on the Dignity and Vocation of Women on the Occasion of the Marian Year (August 15, 1988), § 19. Available online—see the section *References* for details.

Mary is not all that different from the imitation of Christ. Nevertheless, Mary is the feminine form of the Christian image:

The imitation of Mary is not fundamentally different than the imitation of Christ. The imitation of Mary includes the imitation of Christ because Mary is the first Christian to follow Christ, and she is the first and most perfect model of Christ. Indeed, that is why the imitation of Mary is not only relevant to women but to all Christians. But she has a special significance for women, one in accord with their nature, for she leads them to the feminine form of the Christian image.<sup>15</sup>

Mary is the ideal feminine form of the Christian image, because she is the purely developed character of spouse and mother.<sup>16</sup> As spouse, she is trusting and faithful. As mother, she is devoted and does not consider the child as her own property: “She has welcomed Him from God’s hand; she lays Him back into God’s hands by dedicating Him in the Temple and by being with Him at the crucifixion.”<sup>17</sup> John Paul II praises our holy Mother, whose life, at the center of Salvation History offers a powerful insight into the dignity and the vocation of women. He says, “Mary, the woman of the Bible, is the most complete expression of this dignity and vocation.”<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Mary is “the new beginning of the dignity and vocation of women, of each and every women,” because she represents a return to the beginning in which one find the women as she was intended to be in creation and in the eternal mind of God.<sup>19</sup>

“Mary collaborates with every woman wherever she is fulfilling her vocation as woman authentically.”<sup>20</sup> Mary perfectly represents

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<sup>15</sup> Stein, *Woman*, 201.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 47–48.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, § 5.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, § 11.

<sup>20</sup> Oben, *Scholar, Feminist, Saint*, 51

woman's personal outlook, active sympathy, intuitive grasp, and emotional perception. Women should imitate Mary and trust that she truly does concern herself with our lives and our relationships, in the good times and in the bad. The *Memorare* expresses this trust in our holy Mother: "[N]ever was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thine intercession was left unaided."<sup>21</sup> No matter the need or the cost, Mary concerns herself with the human condition and comes to our aid with tenderness and power:

[Mary] is the ideal type of woman who knew how to unite tenderness with power. She stood under the cross. She had previously concerned herself with the human condition, observed it, understood it. In her son's tragic hour she appeared publicly. Perhaps the moment has come for the Catholic woman also to stand with Mary and the Church under the cross.<sup>22</sup>

Women too are called to make a sincere gift of themselves, without holding back, to the human condition and to fight evil as God's instruments of love with feminine tenderness and power.<sup>23</sup> Like Mary, women are called to fight against evil and always remain vigilant the needs of others.

God combats evil through the power of woman's maternal love. That power exists independently of woman's marital status and should be extended to all persons with whom she comes in contact. Everywhere, there is a need for such love, and it is essential to woman's nature that she give it. Just as the Mother of Christ appeared publicly at the crucifixion, so, too, a woman must be involved today in the struggle between good and evil.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Judy Landrieu Klein, *Mary's Way* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press, 2016), 106.

<sup>22</sup> Oben, *Scholar, Feminist, Saint*, 46.

<sup>23</sup> For "Mary appeared publicly in the most dramatic confrontation between good and evil: the Crucifixion." *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>24</sup> Freda Mary Oben, "Translator's Preface to the First Edition," in Stein, *Woman*, ix-x.

Mary is a powerful witness of feminine gentleness and strength. She perfectly expresses all the feminine spiritual powers; she is quiet, warm, clear, empty of self, and mistress of her soul and body. With her as a role model, women make the perfect weapon of God to combat evil.<sup>25</sup> In other words, to become God's instrument, women need to imitate Mary's *fiat*, her total surrender to God. Her *fiat* reflects the perfect image of womanhood in the service of love and is the highest expression of the *feminine genius*.

### Edith Stein's Walk with Mary

In this section, I will focus on how imitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary helped fashion Edith Stein's heart and transformed her into a spiritual mother and spiritual companion as a teacher, a religious sister, and, finally, as a martyr. Stein's conversion began with her witnessing a friend's deep faith and incredible peace at the death of her husband.<sup>26</sup> This was the first time Stein experienced the essence of the Christian faith: the power of the mystery of the cross. It was her reading of St. Teresa of Avila's autobiography that marked her final decision to enter the Catholic Church. Stein was baptized on January 1, 1922. Her whole life changed after her conversion. The famous lecturer and recognized intellectual left the limelight to teach at a quiet Dominican teacher training school for high school girls, novices, and nuns in Spyer, St. Magdalene's.

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<sup>25</sup> Since woman is especially receptive to God's workings in the soul, "[her] mission is to allow herself to become a flexible instrument in God's hand, His special weapon to combat evil." Oben, *Scholar, Feminist, Saint*, 45.

<sup>26</sup> "Adolf Reinach died at the front in November, 1917. His funeral was in Gottingen in December. Edith went to see her friend, his widow Anna Reinach. To her surprise she found a woman at peace rather than a despairing widow. Anna was able to stand up to the blow because of her strong Christian faith. . . . Edith's ability to recognize the workings of another soul gave her at this time a real awareness, a living recognition and knowledge of the power of the cross." *Ibid.*, 15.



At Spyer, Stein was able to make a total and sincere gift of herself to her students in her vocation as teacher and to express her *feminine genius* to her students. She believed that the most exalted vocation of all women is the formation of youth<sup>27</sup> due to woman's unique gift of empathy and concern for others. In her pedagogy, Stein emphasized the importance of women to be educated by authentic women in order that they be formed in accordance with their feminine nature and vocation.<sup>28</sup> One can only teach what one practices oneself<sup>29</sup>—Stein most certainly was an authentic woman who took seriously her responsibility to lay a secure moral and religious foundation for her students.<sup>30</sup>

Although she had wanted to enter into religious life immediately after her baptism, her spiritual director did not allow her due to her distinction as a lay woman and to avoid further hurting her mother.<sup>31</sup> During this period of time at Spyer, Stein immersed herself in Scripture and Liturgy and experienced a transformation of heart; she became balanced, recollected, gentle, patient, modest, and humble. Her spiritual guide attests to her character:

I have seldom met a person in whom so many and such laudable characteristics were united. At the same time, she remained entirely a woman with tender, almost motherly sensitivities. Mystically gifted, she was unpretentious with simple people, scholarly with scholars, a seeker with seekers, I would almost say a sinner with sinners.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Oben writes, "To win children for heaven is genuine maternity: it is the most exalted vocation for all women. To awaken divine sparks in a child's heart is a joy not of this world." *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>28</sup> Stein, *Woman*, 107.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>30</sup> Oben, *Scholar, Feminist, Saint*, 53.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

Before her conversion, Stein was described as “deliciously mischievous” and “witty almost to the point of malice.”<sup>33</sup> Although she still enjoyed laughing until tears ran down her face, now she was the laughingstock as she recounted humorous stories about herself and her family. Recalling Stein’s years at Spyer, one of her student’s at St. Magdalene’s testified: “The most fundamental trait of her character was surely a warm love that could penetrate into another’s mind, suffering with him, and helping him as only a Christ-centered saint is able to do.”<sup>34</sup> Oben writes:

Her critical, even caustic bent had been replaced by the spiritual maternity she was to consider woman’s greatest gift. . . . Her colleagues and students describe her as gentle, patient, modest, loving, humble, happy, lovable, serene, balanced, charitable, and holy.<sup>35</sup>

It is undeniable that Stein’s personality underwent a transformation through the power of grace and through her *fiat* in imitation of Mary.<sup>36</sup> As Oben writes, “Edith herself is an exciting instance of Mary’s pure womanhood. In both, [Stein] the Saint and the Queen of Saints, intellect, will and heart were set in perfect balance by love.”<sup>37</sup> In response to her surrender to God, she grew closer to Mary as she tried to imitate the Blessed Mother’s *fiat*.

Stein, recognized as the intellectual leader of Catholic feminism in Europe, challenged Catholic women to step into the complexities of the human condition<sup>38</sup> and not ignore the challenging questions of the day:

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>36</sup> “The unquenchable formation of the feminine heart is the Divine Heart which alone is able to lead each woman to her perfect fulfilment as woman.” *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 48, 50.

<sup>38</sup> See Stein, *Woman*, 96–97.

Let's get to the point. . . . Do we grasp social problems, the burning problems of today? Do they concern us also? Or are we waiting until others find some solution or until we are submerged by the billows of chaos? . . . We must get in touch with the social ferment of the masses and understand their physical and spiritual needs. . . . In the mind field of today's society, can we justify looking backward continuously while our adversary wages war against our views?<sup>39</sup>

Against the background of Nazism, Stein urged women to immerse themselves in the fight against evil. Stein lived what she preached. Foreseeing the danger awaiting Jews and Christians, she wrote a letter to Pope Pius XI, after failing to obtain a private audience with him, urging him to speak out against Nazism on behalf of the Jewish people.<sup>40</sup> Stein not only bravely spoke out against Nazism, she also courageously decided to stay in Germany, even though she had opportunities to leave.<sup>41</sup> She chose to embrace the cross.

At Münster, in the Church of St. Ludgeri, she spent thirteen straight hours of prayer, during which she made the decision to enter the Carmel to live out her supernatural vocation. As Oben explains, "It was the intention of her innermost being to offer up her prayer and life in reparation for both Jew and Nazi, for the persecutor as well as the persecuted."<sup>42</sup>

On Good Friday, with her passion upon her, Sister Benedicta wrote this poem, which she dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary:

Today I stood with you beneath the Cross,  
And felt more clearly than I ever did  
That you became our Mother only there.

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 224–225.

<sup>40</sup> Oben, *Scholar, Feminist, Saint*, 26.

<sup>41</sup> Stein had previously considered going to work in London and was also given the opportunity to teach in South America, where her brother Arno lived. *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

Even an earthly mother faithfully  
 Seeks to fulfill the last will of her son.  
 But you became the handmaid of the Lord;  
 The life and being of the God made Man  
 Was perfectly inscribed in your own life.  
 So you could take your own into your heart,  
 And with the lifeblood of your bitter pains  
 You purchased life anew for every soul.  
 You know us all, our wounds, our imperfections;  
 But you know also the celestial radiance  
 Which your Son's love would shed on us in Heaven.  
 Thus carefully you guide our faltering footsteps,  
 No price too high for you to lead us to our goal.  
 But those whom you have chosen for companions  
 To stand with you round the eternal throne,  
 They here must stand with you beneath the Cross,  
 And with the lifeblood of their bitter pains  
 Must purchase heavenly glory for those souls  
 Whom God's own Son entrusted to their care.<sup>43</sup>

Sister Benedicta understood that Mary was inviting her to stand with her at the foot of the cross.<sup>44</sup>

At 5:00 PM on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1942, Sister Benedicta and her sister Rosa<sup>45</sup> were picked up by the SS at Echt Carmel and were taken to Amersfoort Prison Camp. The last words heard by the nuns as the two

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<sup>43</sup> María Ruiz Scaperlanda, *Edith Stein: The Life and Legacy of St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross* (Manchester, New Hampshire: Sophia Institute Press, 2017), 126–127.

<sup>44</sup> On Passion Sunday, Sister Benedicta wrote this note to her prioress: “Dear Mother, I beg your Reverence’s permission to offer myself to the Heart of Jesus as a sacrificial expiation for the sake of true peace: that the Antichrist’s sway may be broken, if possible without another world-war, and that a new order may be established. I am asking this today because it is already the twelfth hour. I know that I am nothing, but Jesus wills it, and He will call many more to the same sacrifice in these days.” Oben, *Scholar, Feminist, Saint*, 34.

<sup>45</sup> Rosa had become a member of the Third Order. See Paul Hamans, *Edith Stein and Companions: On the Way to Auschwitz* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010) for a biography of her.

sisters left the convent were Sister Benedicta's as she said to Rosa: "Come, let us go for our people."<sup>46</sup> She had written her last will in June, in which she concluded with a joyful acceptance of her death for the glorification of God, for the intentions of the Church, for the deliverance of Germany, for world peace, and for her family, living and deceased.<sup>47</sup> Stein and her sister were taken to three different camps within a week and were killed in the gas chamber at Auschwitz; they were immediately designated for death as they walked out of their train.<sup>48</sup> Stein revealed her *feminine genius* up to her last breath.

Survivors of the camps witnessed Stein's *feminine genius* the last week of her life and testified to her incredible love. While many of the mothers, in great despair, had given up caring for their own children, "Sister Benedicta at once took care of the poor little ones, washed and combed them, and saw to it that they got food and attention. As long as she was in the camp she made washing and cleaning one of her principal charitable activities, so that everyone was amazed."<sup>49</sup> Even an SS guard remarked,

When I met her in the camp Westerbork I knew this was truly a great woman. She was in the hell of Westerbork only a few days, walking among the prisoners, talking and praying like a saint. Yes, that's what she was. That was the impression which this elderly woman gave, though, on the other hand, she was quite young. She spoke in such a clear and humble way that anybody who listened to her was seized. A talk with her was like a visit to another world.<sup>50</sup>

Sister Benedicta died a martyr on August 9<sup>th</sup>, 1942, in Auschwitz. On October 11<sup>th</sup>, 1998, John Paul II canonized her and declared

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<sup>46</sup> Oben, *Scholar, Feminist, Saint*, 36.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

her co-patroness of Europe the following year.<sup>51</sup> She is the only female philosopher acknowledged, among the likes of Church Fathers, Medieval Doctors, and more recent thinkers such as John Henry Newman and Jacques Maritain, in John Paul II's Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*, as a courageous thinker whose philosophical enquiry was enriched by engaging the data of faith.<sup>52</sup> On the occasion of her canonization, the Pope says this about St. Teresa Benedica of the Cross: "The love of Christ was the fire that inflamed the life of St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross."<sup>53</sup>

Edith Stein, seized by the love of Christ, understood the intimate relationship between love and truth, of feeling and truth. She took recourse to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary as a source of strength and consolation during the horrific period in human history instilled with Nazi ideology and crime. Stein's walk with Mary, during which she joined her own joyful, sorrowful, glorious, and luminous life experiences to those of Christ's, reveals the transformative power of the imitation of Mary as women strive to unlock their *feminine genius* in order that they may be the wives and the mothers their home and society needs.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> John Paul II declared Saint Bridget of Sweden and Saint Catherine of Sienna co-patronesses of Europe on the same day.

<sup>52</sup> Of her and the other great philosophers, John Paul II says, "One thing is certain: attention to the spiritual journey of these masters can only give greater momentum to both the search for truth and the effort to apply the results of that search to the service of humanity. It is to be hoped that now and in the future there will be those who continue to cultivate this great philosophical and theological tradition for the good of both the Church and humanity." Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, Encyclical Letter on the Relationship between Faith and Reason (14 September 1998), § 74. Available online—see the section *References* for details.

<sup>53</sup> John Paul II, *Homily for the Canonization of Edith Stein* (11 October 1998), § 5–6. Available online—see the section *References* for details.

<sup>54</sup> "How well Edith Stein incarnates the essence of holiness. As a woman of intellectual and spiritual stature, she is a witness to authentic feminism." Oben, "Translator's Preface to the First Edition," in Stein, *Woman*, xi.

## Conclusion

In the light of the above considerations it can be concluded that Edith Stein, understanding the meaning and power of the *feminine genius*, challenges women today to prepare their hearts for their great mission—to cultivate a civilization of love and a culture of life—by transforming them into pure vessels of love in imitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary: the highest expression of the *feminine genius*. The life of Stein herself demonstrates how imitation of Mary provides women a secure path towards spiritual motherhood and spiritual companionship and how this walk with Mary unlocks the *feminine genius* from their hearts.



### Edith Stein on the Highest Expression of the *Feminine Genius*

#### SUMMARY

Edith Stein sees the highest expression of the *feminine genius* in the Blessed Virgin Mary. This article presents (1) Edith Stein's insights into what it means to walk with Mary and how her imitation provides women a secure path to nurturing a healthy emotional life necessary for fruitful spiritual motherhood and spiritual companionship, and (2) Edith Stein's life which offers a concrete and relatively recent example of how the imitation of Mary helps women unlock their *feminine genius*.

#### KEYWORDS

Edith Stein, feminine genius, the Blessed Virgin Mary, spiritual motherhood, spiritual companionship.

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